United Nations A/C.4/66/SR.19

General Assembly
Sixty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
7 February 2012

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 31 October 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Miculescu ..... (Romania)
later: Mr. Kelly (Vice-Chair) ..... (Ireland)

Contents

Agenda item 52: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

11-57205 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 52: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
(A/66/13 and Add.1, A/66/222, A/66/296, A/66/318 and A/66/520)

1. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that major changes had been taking place in the Middle East while Palestine refugees looked on, frustrated by a stalled peace process that should have ended their long exile. The political context of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to which the Palestinian bid for full membership of the United Nations had added another dimension, remained challenging. He called for calm on all sides in view of the recent escalation in violence, voicing the hope that the agreement to release prisoners would improve regional stability, to which UNRWA had contributed throughout its 62-year history. Palestine refugees must continue to be protected in accordance with international law.

2. In 2010, the Israeli authorities had eased the blockade of the Gaza Strip, allowing in more goods, including construction materials for United Nations projects. By October 2011, the Israeli Government had approved UNRWA construction projects valued at approximately $188 million, out of a total estimate for reconstruction of $661 million over three years. However, import procedures had delayed a number of infrastructure projects. While the Agency appreciated Israel's security concerns, the outstanding projects were related to the security of the refugees. Rebuilding Gaza's infrastructure was crucial for Gaza's physical reconstruction, but social and economic recovery was impossible under the illegal blockade, which made its people aid dependent. Gaza faced an unsustainable situation in which its productive capacity was being stifled while its basic needs were met through United Nations intervention. For four years, it had depended on international aid or the tunnel economy.

3. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Israeli occupation continued to have a negative impact on human rights. Despite some improvements in their economic situation, refugees remained vulnerable and isolated, suffering persistent rates of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity. According to a recent report, the restrictions on trade and movement had resulted in economic losses of up to $6.9 billion in 2010. In East Jerusalem, home demolitions and revocations of Palestinian residency rights, together with settlement construction, posed threats to human security. Homes and property belonging to Bedouin communities were repeatedly demolished.

4. UNRWA had to provide special humanitarian assistance in the West Bank and Gaza, but only 39 per cent of its emergency appeal needs had been met in 2010, with a similar outlook for 2011. Noting that the unemployment rate in Gaza was one of the world's highest, he said that the wide funding gap had forced the Agency to halt new emergency employment in Gaza and to postpone food procurement for the first distribution in 2012. In September 2011, UNRWA had appealed for an additional $36 million for emergency protection activities targeting vulnerable refugees. With humanitarian needs likely to remain urgent in 2012, he called for further generous donations to be made.

5. UNRWA had welcomed the Lebanese Parliament's decision in 2010 to grant Palestinians access to formal employment in the private sector. Such measures would reduce their dependence on aid while preserving their refugee status. Nonetheless, Palestinians in Lebanon continued to live in some of the region's worst conditions for refugees; a survey had revealed that 56 per cent were unemployed and two thirds were officially poor. UNRWA had recently requested an extra $147 million to address special needs. In northern Lebanon, progress had been made in rebuilding the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp, destroyed during the conflict in 2007, but the project faced a $195 million funding shortfall, not counting the $26 million needed to assist displaced families until their homes were rebuilt.

6. Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to enjoy social and economic rights, but the adverse political and security environment was of great concern. While there was no indication that the refugees were being specifically targeted, they had suffered deaths, injuries and forced displacement. The Agency had joined calls for the violence to end and had received assurances that the Syrian Government would facilitate UNRWA operations. Meanwhile, the Agency's existing staff were responding to the increased humanitarian needs.

7. Jordan remained a stable environment for Palestine refugees, enabling UNRWA to focus on its programming and reform plans. However, a sizeable 42 per cent of the refugees registered with UNRWA lived in Jordan, many of them in poverty. The Government was improving its support for vulnerable citizens and had appealed to the international community to provide for refugees' development needs.

8. The continued lack of adequate funding for the Agency's core services was of considerable concern. Shortfalls in the previous two years had been bridged at the last minute owing to the generosity of a few donors. There was currently a shortfall of $46 million, putting operations for December 2011 at risk. Moreover, projected contributions for 2012-2013 were substantially below the level required to achieve the Agency's human development goals. In addition, UNRWA faced pressure to raise its staff's salaries, in line with public sector wages in the host countries. Yet major donors had warned that substantial additional funding could not be expected. All donors, including non-traditional ones and Arab States, should increase funding in 2011 and in future years, to place the Agency's work on a firm and predictable financial footing.

9. Having revitalized its resource mobilization strategy, the Agency wished to strengthen ties with major donors and secure new ones. He was encouraged by the response of new donors, such as Brazil, India and Turkey, while some countries, such as Iraq, had resumed funding. He urged Arab States, which had generously supported emergency appeals and projects, to contribute more to the General Fund. Noting the Secretary-General's recommendation to increase the Agency's funding under the regular budget, endorsed by the General Assembly in April 2011, he thanked the Secretary-General for his support.

10. Mindful that it must achieve more with less funding, the Agency was pursuing institutional reform, such as the innovative, results-oriented "sustaining change" plan, designed to improve service delivery. Having made good progress in the spheres of education and health, UNRWA must prioritize relief and social services, targeting the most vulnerable refugees. In line with the Agency's commitment to self-scrutiny, the results of an independent evaluation of the organizational development programme would be used to improve operations. Millions of Palestine refugees would continue to depend on the attention and generosity of the international community, until a just and durable political settlement was reached.

11. **Mr. Assaraf** (Israel) asked why, when describing the situation in Gaza, the Commissioner-General had not mentioned the rockets that were being fired at Israeli citizens.

12. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) thanked UNRWA and its staff for their outstanding work to help almost 5 million Palestine refugees. He also thanked the people and Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic for their assistance, which would continue to be necessary until a just solution to the question of Palestine was found in accordance with international law and General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

13. The Agency operated in abnormal circumstances, with repeated emergencies resulting from acts of aggression perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people, in particular in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and, specifically, in the Gaza Strip, where Israel had not allowed reconstruction to take place. He recalled that $4.5 million had been pledged at the Sharm el-Sheikh donors' meeting for such reconstruction, in which United Nations agencies would play a major role, particularly in the areas of housing and infrastructure. However, Israel maintained its illegal blockade. He thanked UNRWA, donors and the Lebanese Government and people for their efforts to rebuild the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp. The first phase had been completed and he hoped that UNRWA would receive the necessary funding to complete the process.

14. Since the current international economic and financial crisis would undoubtedly affect the Agency's ability to deliver services, he supported calls for donor countries to meet the needs of its core budget and emergency funding.

15. Palestine had applied for admission to membership in the United Nations. For two years, it had been building State institutions and a number of international bodies had declared it ready for independent nationhood as a middle-income country. With over two thirds of the General Assembly supporting the application, he hoped that the Security Council would endorse it. Furthermore, Palestine had just been admitted as a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the first time it had been granted full membership of a

major United Nations agency. Palestine would not have been able to wage the national struggle that had led it to those achievements without support from UNRWA, to which he pledged full support.

16. **Ms. Vivas Mendoza** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, according to the Commissioner-General's report, 87 Palestinians, including nine children, had been killed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2010 and another 1,543, including 360 children, had been injured in conflict-related violence. She asked what the United Nations did to guarantee the protection of civilians in the occupied territories.

17. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt) asked whether there was any prospect that UNRWA's budget shortfall might be bridged before the year's end and, if not, whether operations on the ground would be affected.

18. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon), recalling the suffering of Palestine refugees, asked whether UNRWA had estimated the extra costs associated with the Israeli blockade of Gaza.

19. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said in reply that UNRWA's public condemnation of the killing of civilians in all areas of its operations, including those killed by rockets from Gaza, was on record. Without entering into details, he had expressed UNRWA's appreciation of Israel's security concerns. He repeated his call for calm on all sides.

20. Thanking the observer for Palestine for his expression of support, he said that UNRWA looked forward to Palestinian support in the future.

21. The United Nations protected civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in many ways. It was not sufficiently known that many potential problems were resolved through diplomatic channels with the Israeli authorities at the field level, for which he expressed appreciation. Advocacy was another important tool. While the main responsibility lay with agencies with exclusive mandates, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNRWA had an important role to play when Palestine refugees were specifically affected. The Agency protected civilians through its work in education and health, and coordinated the agencies responsible for human rights. Civilians must be protected not only in the Occupied Palestinian Territory but also in the broader region, including Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

22. The shortfall of $46 million in the core budget would affect the Agency's most important activities, namely schools, hospitals and social work; without funding, staff could not be paid. The Agency was conducting intensive negotiations with three or four key donors and hoped to fill the deficit. Otherwise, it would be unable to pay staff salaries for December 2011, postponing payment until January 2012. Donors frequently asked UNRWA to improve its planning but the current uncertainty hampered planning. Donors faced hardship but the number of refugees and their needs were growing exponentially.

23. It was difficult to cost the procedures related to the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. Under an agreement with the Israeli authorities, maximum vigilance had to be exercised over the materials entering Gaza and, although it was costly, UNRWA was doing so to the apparent satisfaction of all concerned. In 2010, UNRWA had spent $1.9 million on storage and transportation, in addition to the normal cost of importing goods into Gaza. The cost in 2011 would be higher because of larger consignments, which were otherwise to be welcomed.

24. **Mr. Løvold** (Norway), speaking as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA and introducing its report (A/66/520), said that the Agency's funding crisis had become structural and the prospects of bridging the shortfall, currently $47.6 million, remained distant. The crisis undermined access to and the quality of some UNRWA services, increased hardships for the staff and made it difficult for the Agency to comply with its mandate. Donations were therefore urgently needed to ensure that UNRWA's services were maintained. Until a just and durable solution was found to the Palestinian issue, the international community shared responsibility for ensuring that UNRWA's programmes were adequately funded. Despite the generosity of donors, the General Fund budget fell short of meeting even the minimum needs of a Palestine refugee population growing at 3 per cent a year and facing humanitarian problems. About $145 million must be quickly injected into UNRWA's working capital reserves. UNRWA had already endeavoured to improve its mobilization of resources, by establishing a new External Relations and Communications Department and widening its donor

base; the Working Group supported further financial reform.

25. In view of the difficult operational and humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in Gaza, the Working Group urged all potential donors, including countries in the Middle East, to fund in full the Agency's emergency appeals for 2011. The scant funding received for rebuilding the Nahr el-Bared camp was especially alarming. The Working Group supported further opening the Gaza crossings, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The General Assembly should review the current levels and scope of funding from the regular budget while Member States should consider the Secretary-General's recommendation to increase that funding without an overall budget increase.

26. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) thanked UNRWA and its entire staff in every field of operation for their commitment to providing services and emergency assistance to Palestine refugees. Regrettably, the Agency's staff did not receive hazard pay, despite often working in difficult and dangerous conditions, a situation that should be remedied. The continuing plight of the refugees remained of the highest priority for the Palestinian leadership, as it strove for a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while Israel rejected the basic principles of the peace process. It was deeply regrettable and worrying that the rights of the Palestine refugees continued to be denied, despite General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions. The lack of a just settlement of the question of Palestine, owing to Israel's intransigence and total disregard for international law, had compounded the tragic effects of the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians, greatly worsening the conflict.

27. The Palestine refugee question remained the largest and most protracted in the world. Over half of all Palestinians were refugees — living for three generations in poverty, hardship and instability, millions of them in camps — while the rest suffered Israeli oppression under the military occupation. Those living in camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular Gaza, were the worst off. Yet Israel denied the rights of the Palestine refugees and any responsibility for their plight. The refugees faced harsh socio-economic conditions and instability on the ground, which compounded the Agency's financial burdens, while Israel deliberately obstructed UNRWA's operations and maintained its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, UNRWA continued its employment and microfinance programmes, offering refugees opportunities for a livelihood and development. She highlighted some of the Agency's efforts in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in Gaza and the West Bank, for which Palestinians were grateful.

28. She deplored Israel's continued undermining of UNRWA's work and its illegal obstruction of refugee access to services in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which affected every aspect of the refugees' lives. Israel must be compelled to abide by its obligations under international law. She reiterated Palestine's deep appreciation for the principled global support for UNRWA's mission, which reflected a political and humanitarian commitment to the rights and well-being of the Palestine refugees. The international community should intensify efforts to promote the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital; that would end the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with United Nations resolutions, through a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. In his statement before the General Assembly, President Mahmoud Abbas had called for an immediate end to the suffering of millions of Palestine refugees in their homeland and the diaspora. It was the responsibility of the international community to grant the Palestinians their rights and ensure that they could enjoy the stability, peace and justice they had been denied for too long.

29. *Mr. Kelly (Ireland), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

30. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, stressed UNRWA's role in serving more than 4.8 million Palestine refugees, improving their plight through the provision of services, in addition to its work in the areas of camp infrastructure, microfinance and emergency assistance. That role would remain essential until the Palestine refugees realized their inalienable rights pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). In the meantime Israel continued to deny and violate the rights of Palestine refugees and impair their well-being, safety and human development. The refugees' suffering had steadily worsened after 44 years of military occupation and systematic violations of international law. Moreover, Israel's illegal practices included the targeting of UNRWA's personnel and facilities in the

Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obstruction of the Agency's ability to discharge its mandate. He condemned Israel's breach of the inviolability of United Nations premises; Israel must respect its obligations under the Charter and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and allow the Agency unfettered access to its beneficiaries. It must cease the military targeting of the Agency, the obstruction of its movements, the harassment of its personnel and the levying of taxes and fees on the Agency, which undermined its work and added to its financial burdens.

31. He reiterated the Movement's call for the full lifting of Israel's blockade, which had been unjustly imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than four years with a gravely detrimental impact on the socio-economic and humanitarian conditions of the refugee community and on the Agency's work. In addition to permanently opening the crossings, the occupying Power must cease its restrictions on importing construction materials, which the Agency needed for the long overdue reconstruction of schools, housing and civilian infrastructure. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel continued its settlement and wall construction and expansion, along with its tight regime of closures, checkpoints, house demolitions, raid-and-arrest campaigns and military operations. The international community should ensure that those illegal activities, which had a devastating effect on the Palestinian population and undermined the Agency's activities, were halted immediately.

32. The Agency's ability to realize its objectives was affected by donor countries' policies and the changes taking place within the refugee population. Serious consideration should be given to ways of increasing contributions to ease the ongoing financial shortfalls, exacerbated by the situation on the ground. A just and lasting solution to the Palestine refugee question was vital for the settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. All necessary efforts must be exerted to that end so that Palestine could soon celebrate statehood, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

33. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Croatia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia; and, in addition, the Republic of Moldova, commended the commitment of UNRWA's staff and management who, often in difficult conditions, provided essential services to Palestine refugees. The Agency's activities were all crucial to the well-being of the refugee population. The European Union and its member States remained the Agency's largest donor, having donated more than 1.2 billion euros from 2000 to 2010, while individual States had contributed significant amounts during the same period. The European Union indicated its support to the General Fund for several years at a time; under the latest joint declaration, it envisaged an annual contribution of 80 million euros in 2011-2013, subject to budgetary allocations.

34. The European Union's contribution to UNRWA in 2011 had been one of the highest for years, totalling 124 million euros by October. Most of those funds had been used to pay the salaries of teachers, doctors and social workers in the refugee camps. As well as its donation to the General Fund, the European Union had made an additional contribution of 2.4 million euros. A further 22 million euros had been mobilized from the Instrument for Stability, of which 10 million euros had been earmarked for the early recovery programme in Gaza. Another 12 million euros had been allocated for the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp. UNRWA had also received 14.3 million euros in humanitarian aid from the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission and 5 million euros through the Food Security Thematic Programme.

35. The Union had supported the Agency's 2011 summer games in Gaza and condemned the fact that some of the facilities had been vandalized. The European Union was particularly concerned about developments in the Syrian Arab Republic affecting the Agency's operations and regretted the attack in August 2011 in the Latakia area, where the refugee camp was located. It had immediately mobilized almost 11 million euros of additional funding for two UNRWA projects in the camp.

36. The European Union had set in motion internal procedures so that it could frontload its 2012 contribution to the Agency's General Fund, to ensure continuity of service delivery to Palestine refugees. He urged new donors to commit financially to UNRWA's work and existing donors to increase their contributions. Finally, he pledged the European Union's unwavering support for the fulfilment of the Agency's tasks and the successful implementation of its reforms.

37. **Mr. Diallo** (Senegal) said that, in violation of the United Nations Charter, the Palestine refugees had been humiliated and deprived for over 60 years, suffering longer than any other group of refugees. There was little reason for optimism, despite all the support for the Palestinians' request for a just and lasting solution to the refugee question in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 194 (III) and 302 (IV). Moreover, everything had been done to persuade Israel to stop impeding UNRWA's operations in the occupied territories. UNRWA had spared no effort to implement its programmes and provide services to some 5 million Palestine refugees. However, the international community must mobilize the necessary resources to enable the Agency to attend to the refugees' human development. In 1974, the United Nations had been mandated to finance only a small part of UNRWA's needs, something that should be reconsidered. Unfortunately the initiatives taken in 2010 had failed to put one of the Organization's most important programmes on a firm financial footing. His delegation believed that, with regard to Palestinian exile, justice delayed was justice denied.

38. **Mr. Saripudin** (Indonesia) said that his Government was deeply disturbed by Israel's continued violation of the rights of Palestine refugees. Israel should lift the blockade of Gaza, which had been imposed on the refugees as a collective punishment and created massive humanitarian difficulties; the crossings should be opened to allow badly needed reconstruction to take place. Israel continued to expand its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, not only obstructing peace but also violating international law and complicating life for Palestine refugees. He acknowledged UNRWA's vital role in contributing to regional stability by improving the refugees' welfare and living conditions, an investment in the peace process.

39. Indonesia strongly supported Palestine's recent application for United Nations membership, a positive step towards peace. He called for the international community to pay urgent attention to the Agency's persistent underfunding, which might result in cuts in or the abandonment of the programme, with grave consequences for the region. It was time to find ways to ensure that UNRWA could continue with its critical work and prepare the way for peace.

40. **Mr. Pham** Vinh Quang (Viet Nam) said that amid global economic turmoil and despite financial constraints, the Agency continued to shoulder great responsibility. His delegation was deeply concerned about the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory resulting from Israel's military occupation and illegal actions. It endorsed the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries' declaration on Palestinian political prisoners; urgent attention must be paid to their grave situation. His delegation regretted the hampering of UNRWA's work by restrictions on its movements and damage to its infrastructure and facilities. The Agency's privileges and immunities must be fully respected and actions that impeded its work must be stopped.

41. Having endured tremendous hardships and losses resulting from war, Viet Nam treasured the cause of peace. He called on all parties to resolve the conflict through political negotiations and refrain from any act that might prejudge their outcome or erode confidence. Israel must stop construction of the separation wall and settlements and lift all restrictive measures and ensure humanitarian access. All parties must abide by international humanitarian and human rights law. Viet Nam had long recognized the State of Palestine and would support its legitimate request for full United Nations membership. It also supported renewed efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States, countries in the region and the United Nations to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues.

42. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the refugee question encompassed international, political, legal and moral responsibilities, not merely a humanitarian responsibility to provide services. An entire people had been the victim of colonialism and international collusion resulting in their expulsion and the occupation of their land. For decades they had suffered persecution, discrimination, ethnic cleansing and denial of their national identity. Numbering over 5 million, they were the world's largest group of refugees, many living under an Israeli occupation that violated the most fundamental human values and principles.

43. More than six decades had elapsed since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, yet the international community was still incapable of implementing it. The same was true of all the other United Nations resolutions on Israel's occupation of Arab lands and the crimes which it committed there, bringing in foreign settlers from around the world to seize Palestinian homes, land and property with the support of States that purportedly

rejected settlements and touted themselves as defenders of human rights.

44. In fact, those States granted Israel exceptional immunity from international law, a disgrace to the United Nations that must not be passed over in silence if international justice and the credibility of the Organization were to be preserved. It was no longer acceptable for the United Nations to evade its responsibility under the Charter to compel Israel to end the occupation of Arab lands and implement internationally binding resolutions, including those relating to the return of the Palestinians to their home.

45. Once again, the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/66/13 and Add.1) described the tragedy visited on the Palestinian people by Israel and the inhumane blockade of Gaza, as Israel continued to thwart reconstruction projects in the Gaza Strip, where it had sown destruction during its 2008 aggression, committing war crimes and grave violations of international humanitarian law that qualified as crimes against humanity. It continued to commit those crimes without being held to account, prevented the rebuilding of UNRWA schools and facilities, and engaged in provocation against UNRWA activities and projects in Gaza.

46. In the Palestinian Territories, the population was subjected to a harsh system of racist restrictions on movement, residence and the exercise of fundamental freedoms, in addition to the apartheid wall, closures and curfews. The Israeli occupation authorities were also intensifying their restriction of the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff and goods, thus adversely affecting the humanitarian situation of the refugees and the ability of UNRWA to carry out its mission.

47. The Arab countries hosts to Palestine refugees were also effective donors, taking into account the services and assistance they provided. Syria was host to half a million Palestine refugees, and treated them as it did its own citizens. In 2010, Syria's assistance to Palestine refugees living in the country had totalled $225 million. Syria also provided all possible support to UNRWA.

48. His Government spared no effort to protect the lives and rights of Palestine refugees within its territory, including in response to recent acts of murder and sabotage by armed terrorist groups. His delegation rejected any distortion of the facts concerning the incident in the Raml al-Janubi camp in Latakia, which had involved normal search operations in pursuit of armed criminals who had taken refuge there. There had been no recourse to armed violence on the part of the Government, nor had any Palestine refugees been injured, as confirmed by Palestinian sources, contrary to inflammatory reports in some media.

49. In order to be able to continue and improve its services, UNRWA needed increased funding, a broader contributor base and fulfilment of contribution pledges. UNRWA should be provided with financial resources under the regular budget of the United Nations in view of the Agency's precarious financial situation and the decline in funding between 2009 and 2010. He called on States which, without the slightest hesitation, earmarked billions of dollars for going to war, interfering in the affairs of other States and providing military and financial assistance to Israel, to revise those policies in line with human rights and civilized humanitarian values. Their allocating even a minuscule part of those funds, rather than shirking their responsibilities, could contribute enormously to assisting the Palestine refugees and improving the inhuman conditions in which they lived.

50. **Mr. Al-Falahi** (United Arab Emirates) expressed his country's concern at the dire situation that Palestine refugees faced as a result of Israeli aggression and repressive policies. He drew attention to the catastrophic socio-economic and human consequences of Israel's violations of the refugees' rights and freedoms. Additional international pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza, desist from hampering UNRWA projects, provide protection to Palestine refugees and guarantee the safety of UNRWA personnel and facilities in accordance with international law. The illegal blockade not only restricted the movement of the Palestine refugees and blocked their access to international humanitarian assistance, but also prevented the reconstruction of schools and hospitals. The problem of the Palestine refugees was linked to the larger question of Palestine, whose solution lay in a comprehensive peace settlement that granted the refugees their full rights under international law.

51. The marked decline in resources and financial support for UNRWA, exacerbated by the global financial crisis and the growing number of refugees, affected not just the Agency's ability to deliver its development programmes and projects but also its emergency assistance and aid programmes. His

Government, which had consistently given the refugees political, financial and moral support, had paid its 2011 contribution to the Agency's budget in full. He urged donors to double their contributions in order to address the budget shortfall and meet the increasingly urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestine refugees. His Government had contributed to efforts to rebuild the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp and welcomed UNRWA's education reform strategy for 2011 to 2015, launched in October 2011.

52. **Ms. Smith** (Norway) said that UNRWA's financial shortfall persisted, with the 2011 deficit projected at 20 per cent of the core budget. With the refugee population growing at 2.4 per cent a year, structural changes in the Agency's financing were required. Mindful that the long-term solution was to enhance the donor base, Norway had been engaged in UNRWA's efforts to attract new donors. In addition, it would continue to cooperate with the Agency with regard to the effective use of resources. For its part, the General Assembly must ensure that UNRWA was properly funded under the regular budget.

53. Further improvements were needed in UNRWA's operations and the second critical phase of reform must be pursued. Economic management had been substantially improved in the past year, but more also had to be done to improve the quality of the Agency's services so that UNRWA could better serve the Palestine refugees. She called for a reassessment of the Agency's cooperation with other stakeholders and partners, through closer coordination with other agencies and bodies, the Palestinian Authority and the host countries. Donors must ensure that their contributions were spent in the most cost-efficient way possible.

54. Since the human resource base in the refugee camps was underused, new ideas were needed to enable economic production and the provision of services in order to increase residents' incomes and improve their living conditions. She suggested launching a camp-based pilot programme involving key stakeholders, including the private sector. Since better-integrated approaches would benefit service delivery in the camps, the international community should help UNRWA to put such ideas into practice. UNRWA had played an important role in the significant progress towards making Palestine ready for statehood, while providing services for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It should do more to develop the social fabric in the camps and the occupied territories, laying the basic foundation for a Palestinian State.

55. **Mr. Alyas** (Saudi Arabia) urged the Agency to continue offering its humanitarian services to all Palestine refugees, alleviating their suffering until they could return to their lands and they received compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). In view of UNRWA's expanding programmes and the growing numbers of refugees, donors should double their contributions to alleviate the Agency's financial troubles. His Government had increased its contribution to $86.7 million in 2011, making it the third biggest donor; it had also allocated $200 million for Al Aqsa Fund projects.

56. His delegation strongly condemned the Gaza blockade and called for it to be lifted forthwith. It demanded the immediate cessation of all arbitrary measures and of restrictions imposed on international aid agencies by Israel, and the removal of the illegal separation wall in the West Bank. The international community should compel Israel to compensate UNRWA for the damage it had caused to the Agency's property. Israeli colonization was one of the last vestiges of colonialism and apartheid. Saudi Arabia had participated in all international peace conferences on Palestine and had proposed the peace initiative adopted by the Arab League in 2002. Financial support was not the only means of solving the refugees' problems. They required political support from the international community in order to resolve the Palestinian issue through recognition of their State by the United Nations, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and with its capital in East Jerusalem. If the refugees were allowed to return under a just and comprehensive peace based on United Nations resolutions, security and stability would be restored throughout the region.

57. **Mr. Tarawneh** (Jordan) said that the crux of the conflict in the Middle East was the Palestinian issue, at the heart of which lay the problem of the Palestine refugees. His Government had always sought a solution to that problem in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which provided for the return of the Palestine refugees and compensation for their losses, as well as with the Arab peace initiative and the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli

peace treaty, which called for a solution based on international law.

58. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had been created in 1949 to deal specifically with the affairs of the Palestine refugees, thus placing the United Nations and the international community face to face with their responsibilities towards them. He reaffirmed the importance of continuing to entrust that role to UNRWA until the question was resolved.

59. UNRWA figures indicated that Jordan was host to 2 million Palestine refugees, or 42 per cent of the Palestine refugee community, a situation that strained its budget, already in deficit. In 2011 the country would spend $900 million on refugee services. Yet Jordan was allotted only 21 per cent of the UNRWA general budget. He reaffirmed the need for a fair share of the Agency's allocations, particularly in view of the country's economic problems. The provision by Jordan of services to the refugees in no way signified approval of any reduction in the services or financing of UNRWA or relinquishment of the right of return.

60. The enormous disparity between the Agency's responsibilities and its budget was alarming, threatening both its role and the refugee community, which was in dire need of support. Any reduction in services would adversely affect peace and security in the region; all donor States should honour their financial commitments without delay and increase their contributions, while further efforts should be made to expand the donor base.

61. It was also important to expand the work of UNRWA to include all 13 camps in Jordan and to extend that work to other areas of the country, inasmuch as 82 per cent of the Palestine refugees in Jordan lived outside the camps. The Government flatly rejected the pressure exerted on UNRWA to curtail its services, which must, rather, be developed and improved. It intended, moreover, to grant UNRWA land for building schools and health centres, and welcomed the Agency's intention to open a hospital in the Irbid camp. It also valued the role of the Norwegian Government in financing, together with the Fafo Foundation, a survey of the conditions of Palestine refugees in the Kingdom's camps.

62. **Mr. Zhang** Changwei (China) agreed that UNRWA was working in very difficult circumstances, in the face of a challenging humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The blockade of Gaza had made the lives of refugees more difficult. His Government urged Israel to lift the blockade and allow humanitarian aid and commodities to reach the refugees. Calling on the international community to help the refugees, he said that donors should honour their commitments promptly. China had always supported UNRWA's work and was concerned about its funding shortfall. It had made a contribution to the Agency every year since 1981 and would continue to do so. China had always been a supporter of the just cause of an independent Palestinian State and therefore backed Palestine's application to become a full Member of the United Nations. A just and lasting solution to the refugee question was vital for the settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

63. **Archbishop Chullikatt** (Observer for the Holy See) said that as the global economic situation worsened so did UNRWA's finances. Facing a growing number of refugees and new demands for services, the Agency and the non-governmental organizations assisting the refugees were fast approaching breaking point. A just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — long overdue — was the key to many problems facing the Middle East; the two-State solution offered the best chance for ending the refugees' suffering. The failure of the parties to resolve their differences caused violence that affected innocent people on both sides; moreover, it had worldwide implications, having been exploited by many for geopolitical gains. In the meantime, a fourth generation of Palestinians had been born into refugee status. The Holy See considered Palestine's quest for admission as a State Member of the United Nations from the perspective of attempts to find a definitive solution. Courageous decisions must be made for the sake of peace. The Palestinians were entitled to an independent State while Israelis had a right to security, both within internationally recognized borders.

64. Recalling that Jerusalem was the spiritual patrimony of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, he called on the parties to negotiate in good faith and ensure religious freedom in the city and grant access to the Holy Places for people of all faiths and nationalities. The international community must facilitate meaningful negotiations in order to reach a reasonable compromise so as to secure a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.